



*Wittnauer Precious Metals Guild*

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# THE MEDALLIC COLLECTOR'S NEWSLETTER

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## The Evolution Of Meritorious Medals

To most Americans the picture of a medal-bedecked military man suggests comic opera, or foreign courts with royalty. American democratic tradition does not include the pomp and ceremony connected with decorations and titles. And this American philosophy had a direct bearing on the type of medals bestowed by the United States Government.

Medals connoting reward for brave deeds can be traced back to the first century A.D. Records show that a medallion decoration was awarded by an Emperor of China to a loyal leader of his court. No other details are available as to the occasion or circumstance, but the tradition of medal-giving seems to have begun there.

Mention of medal-giving continued sporadically until the year 1588, when a medal was issued in England that is considered the foundation of the British system of decoration. The medal, issued by Queen Elizabeth I, is known to collectors as the "Ark in Flood" because an ark floating on waves is shown on the reverse side. Details are sketchy, but historians presume the Ark in Flood was awarded to leaders who carried out the destruction of the Spanish Armada, resulting in a crucial naval victory.

Following the Elizabethan period, medals were often cast and presented to military and governmental figures. The recipients were invariably highly-placed commanders or leaders. One notable exception occurred during the Puritan era, when the rank and file received a token medal. Cromwell's army defeated a Royalist uprising in Scotland in 1650, and at Cromwell's request Parliament voted to award the officers small gold medals and the men larger silver medals. Giving recognition to ordinary soldiers was, for the time, a startling move.



QUEEN ELIZABETH.

However, the fact that the medals were visually different still helped to maintain the distance between officers and their troops.

No true precedents were established in the British awards system either for earning decorations or for citing meritorious foot soldiers. Periodically some sort of medal would be given to all the military forces that took part in a victory, but most often the old idea still held: official medals for commanders only.

The Honorable East India Company, which was chartered by the British Government to be the ruling force in India, had its own standing army for many years. Its practice was to give out medals to



everyone—officers and men, whites and natives—who had fought in crucial encounters. But an actual code of decorations was still not decided upon. The awarding of a medal was left to the whim of the ruler.

In America, things were slightly different. Here Congress controlled the issuing of decorations. During the Revolution, General George Washington was awarded a gold medal in 1776 by the newly formed Congress for his part in ousting British forces from Boston earlier that year.

Similarly, John Paul Jones was rewarded after his victorious naval battle with the “Serapis” in 1779. The following year, 1780, saw the decorating of the three men, Paulding, Williams and Van Wart, who captured the infamous Major John Andre as he was returning to British headquarters after having arranged with General Benedict Arnold for the betrayal of West Point. That medal, referred to today as the “Paulding Medal,” was a rather ornate oval shape featuring the word “Fidelity.”

It was during the closing days of the Revolution, in 1782, that the philosophy behind American medallic decorations was formulated. From his headquarters at Newburgh, New York, General Washington issued a remarkable order, dated August 7, 1782, which again articulated the American belief in the equality of man.

The dispatch reads:

*“The General, ever desirous to cherish a virtuous ambition in his soldiers, as well as to foster and encourage every species of military merit, directs that, whenever any singularly meritorious action is performed, the author of it shall be permitted to wear on his facings, over his left breast, the figure of a heart in purple cloth or silk, edged with narrow lace or binding. Not only instances of unusual gallantry, but also of extraordinary fidelity, and essential service in any way, shall meet with a due reward. Before this favour can be conferred on any man, the particular fact, or facts, on which it is to be grounded, must be set forth to the Commander-In-Chief, accompanied with certificates from the Commanding Officers of the Regiment and Brigade to which the Candidate for reward belonged, or other incontestable proof; and, upon granting it, the name and regiment of the person, with the action so certified, are to be enrolled in the Book of Merit, which will be kept at the Orderly Office. Men who have merited this distinction to be suffered to pass all guards and sentinels which officers are permitted to do. The road to glory in a patriot army and a free country, is thus opened to all. This order is also to have retro-*

*spect to the earliest stages of the war, and is to be considered a permanent one.”*

Thus the Purple Heart became the first decoration in history which had a general application to enlisted men and officers alike. The wording of the order is extremely interesting also, i.e. the phrases “to cherish a virtuous ambition” and “to foster and encourage every species of military merit.” These emphasized the General’s belief that the newest recruit was as vital as the skilled leader in a democratic army, and that every activity was equally important.

The Purple Heart fell into disuse in the years following the Revolution, but the democratic concept remained. The Purple Heart was re-established in 1932 and is now made of metal, with a raised likeness of George Washington centered on an enameled heart edged in gold. The ribbon from which the heart is suspended is a rich purple moiré silk bordered in white.



Today the Purple Heart is awarded to everyone wounded in action in all branches of the United States military, and to the next of kin of those killed in action or dying from wounds received while in combat.

### Mottos On English Coins

Mottos on British coins trace back to the reign of Edward III, 1327-1377 A.D. Edward is reputed to be the true father of the gold monies of England, introducing coins such as the florin and half-florin into English coinage. Mottos became standard parts of coins up to the reign of Charles II, 1660-1685. Most often the mottos were religious, but some had political overtones. It is amusing to see how mottos were used by various rulers to state a point, back up an adventure, or proselytise a bit. The old saying, “Even the Devil quotes scripture” comes to mind!





Edward III, who had pretensions toward the throne of France, began including the Latin motto “Posui Deum Adiutorem Meum” on his groats and half-groats. This motto translates to “I have taken God to be my helper” which looks passable at first glance until the derivation becomes apparent, with the strong political overtones.

Another Edward—Edward VI (1547-1553)—struggling through the stormy Reformation Period, did a bit of propagandising with the mottos on his shillings. The shillings state ominously, “Timor Domini Fons Vitae”, Prov. xiv. 27. which means, “The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life.”

The Catholic Queen Mary, 1553-1558, used a line from an unknown Latin poet quoted by Aulus Gellius to allude to her attempt to bring Britain back under Catholic rule. Both the groats and the half-groats issued by Mary read, “Veritas Temporis Filia” meaning, “Truth is the daughter of time.”

The religious struggles during the reigns of Mary, Elizabeth I and James I (1603-1625) were also documented by a coin motto that served as a rallying cry for both sides—the Catholics and the non-Catholics. From Ps. cxvii, 23: “A Domino Factum Est Istud Et Est Mirabile In Oculis Nostris.” A true fence-sitter, politically, this motto translates to, “This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.”

James I, busy with the unification of Scotland and England, selected likely mottos for his gold sovereigns, “Faciam Eos In Gentem Unam,” Ezek. xxxvii.22., or, “I will make them one nation.” And on his silver crowns and other silver pieces, James borrowed out of context from Matthew xix. 6: “Quae Deus Conjunxit Nemo Separet” which is the oft-used wedding quote, “What God hath joined let no man put asunder.”

The Commonwealth, 1649-1660, hastily abandoned all Latin mottos as part of their determined actions to banish all traces of papacy from the country. The motto, however, did remain as a standard element in the coins of that period. For the first and only time, a statement written in plain English was adopted: “God With Us.” It is interesting to note, in the perspective of history, that the Puritans obviously felt no need to include the word

“Be” in the phrase, i.e. “God Be With Us.” Apparently they were sure.

The Puritan years were the beginning of the end for mottos, religious or propagandising. The taboo on adornments and embellishments took its toll in coin design as well as in the rest of the society. Along with the increased severity came a greater emphasis on crime and criminal acts. The paths of evil into which the Devil could lead the unwary received almost more publicity than the day-to-day good that was around.

Crime, of course, brings punishment ... which was a major interest of the Puritans. Oliver Cromwell, 1653-1658, utilized the mottos on coins he issued to warn the populace against the illegal practise of coin clipping. The motto was placed on the outer edge of each coin, forming a circular border which read, “Has Nisi Periturus Mihi Adimat Nem.” Which roughly translates to, “The penalty for clipping this coin is death.” The new placement of the motto proved quite effective since coins could be quickly checked for clipping merely by inspecting the letters of the motto to see that none of them were reduced other than by normal wear and handling.

The efficiency of the border-motto was retained by Charles II, 1660-1685, when royalty was back on the throne of England. The harsh strictures of the Puritan years were modified into a more gracious gentility which is marvelously illustrated by the new motto Charles placed around the edge of all his coins. “Decus Et Tutamen” read the motto, which means, “An ornament and a safeguard.”



### Hog-Money

The earliest coin issue for the North American colonies was the “Hog-money” dating to about 1616-1624. These coins were struck by English settlers in the Sommers Islands, or the Bermudas, under the British Governor Tuckar. Very little is known about the Hog-money, and examples of the issue are extremely rare. British numismatists believe four denominations were coined: copper shillings, twopences, threepences and sixpences.



All the Hog-money shows a stylized representation of a curly-tailed hog in bristly side view on the front of the coin. A three masted sailing ship with all sails flying is on the reverse side. The hog must have been enormously plentiful in the Bermudas to merit commemorating it on all the coinage. Since the Bermudas were a common stopping place enroute to the New World colonies, and thus a tie back to the mother country, an engraving of the threemasted ship, rather than smaller local craft, logically appears on coins.

All the Hog-money issued was marked with Roman numerals indicating value, and the shilling and sixpence were inscribed, "Sommer Ilands" and "Sommer Islands" respectively.

No examples of Hog-money have been found in the Southern colonies to indicate its use on the North American mainland. The initial mainland coinage is generally accepted as being the Massachusetts Colony's Pine Tree Shilling, and other Tree coins, issued beginning about 1652.

### Three Centuries Of Canadian Coins

The history of Canadian coins began just over 300 years ago, in 1670, when France struck the first coins for use in Canada. Before that time beaver skins, copper shields, wampum and other valuables were used by fur traders as means of exchange. Throughout the years of French rule, France continued to distribute coins in Canada, but because they were issued in limited quantities, the Canadian Bank of Montreal and La Banque du Peuple issued tokens to supplement the coin supply. Another unofficial coin of the colonial period was the *jeton*, or counter, that France distributed to aid in the reckoning of sums in the Old French fractional type of currency.



Modern Canadian coinage began in 1858. It was in that year that a decimal coinage system based on 100 cents to the dollar became the official exchange medium in the Province of Canada. Large bronze cents and silver 5, 10 and 20-cent pieces went into use. These coins took the place of British sterling and the wide variety of foreign and private issues that were in circulation. Prior to 1908, the coins were minted by the Royal Mint (The Tower Mint) in London or by The Heaton

Mint in Birmingham. The 1858 shipment from England, plus an additional shipment of 9 million cents dated 1859, met the Province's needs until a few years after the Canadian Confederation was formed in 1867.

The first year coins were struck by the newly-formed Confederation was 1870. These coins were similar to the 1858-59 provincial series, except that the 20-cent piece was omitted and 25-cent and 50-cent silver pieces were added. Those provinces that were not yet part of the Confederation had their own coinage systems. One of the more noteworthy of the non-Confederation coins was a bronze cent issued by Prince Edward Island. The coin, portraying Queen Victoria, is unique in that it is the only one ever to be issued in Canada with the royal title in English rather than Latin.

In 1908 The Royal Canadian Mint at Ottawa started full-scale operation, and from that date on all Canada's coins were struck there. Among the first coins issued was the British gold sovereign. The letter "C" that was inscribed on its reverse side makes it the only Canadian coin to bear a mint mark.



In 1935 Canada's first silver dollars were issued in commemoration of the 25th year of King George V's reign. Since that year silver dollars have been put out regularly, with the exception of the 1940-44 war years. Canada's silver dollars, especially the commemoratives, are valued by collectors the world over.

Not to be overlooked in recent coin history is the 7-coin "Wildlife Set" struck in 1967 honoring the Confederation's centennial. Two new 100th anniversary coins soon to be issued are a 25-cent piece and a silver dollar in commemoration of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in their 100th year of existence. The quarter will show a "Mountie" in ceremonial dress, while the silver dollar will depict a number of the Northwest Mounted Police on patrol.

